

The INQUIRER

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It's
about
time

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The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

Chalice Lighting: Divine spark from sacred dark

Divine spark from sacred dark

Symbol of our holy intent

Illuminate this hour.

— Kathy A Huff

Congratulations!

Winners in the recent election to the Executive Committee of
the General Assembly are:

- James Barry: Ditchling Unitarians
- Joan Cook: St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh
- Robert Ince: Fulwood Old Chapel, Sheffield
- Louise Rogers: Newcastle-under-Lyme Meeting House
- Jacqueline Woodman: Manchester College Oxford Chapel
Society

Editor's View

Safeguarding is essential

It over a month since Greater Manchester Police released a statement saying
that their investigations into alleged sexual abuse by Sir Cyril Smith should
have resulted in a trial.

The police statement expressed sympathy for those believed to have been
abused by Sir Cyril. And, certainly, our thoughts must be with them.

But the pain of the alleged abuse reaches beyond them too. As a well-known
and widely respected Unitarian, many people across the movement and within
Sir Cyril's family may also feel pained or betrayed by the allegations.

According to Essex Hall, no one has alleged any wrongdoing by Sir Cyril
while he was volunteering within the Unitarian movement. And, the General
Assembly has pledged to cooperate if any information is sought by police. In
the wake of the allegations, the tribute to Sir Cyril which was posted on the
national website has been removed.

But the most important thing that must come from these allegations – and
indeed those made about many high-profile individuals over the past year – is
the knowledge that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults among us is
essential. It is not a nicety. According to Greater Manchester Police, the first
allegations against Sir Cyril were made in 1970 – when there was much less
awareness of the nature of sexual abuse. Some have suggested that standards
would be different now. But all the awareness in the world doesn't help when
a child is betrayed by an adult they trust, when lifelong harm is inflicted in a
moment.

Every congregation of Unitarians, every fellowship, should have a
safeguarding officer. The General Assembly is a member of the Churches
Child Protection Advisory Service, an organisation which offers safeguarding
training and which processes Criminal Records Bureau checks for Unitarian
volunteers. A safeguarding training day is planned for 26 January in Bristol.
For more information see <http://www.unitarian.org.uk/info/events.shtml>

A little boy I knew years ago was asked by his mother if he knew how to stay
safe, if someone offered him a lift. He replied, 'If it says "stranger" on the car, I
shouldn't get in.' If only it were that easy to identify the people among us who
would take advantage of a child. But it isn't. That is why we must have training,
procedures and background checks.

— MC Burns

Considering time beyond the new year

By Ashley Hills

Let me begin by explaining that by 'Time' I understand time as we know it here on earth. I know that Albert Einstein suggests in his Theory of Relativity that an hour of time here on earth may equal one million years on a planet remote from this earth. But I am concerned with time as we know and experience it here on the human scale.

Please forgive me if I begin with myself, but I used to believe that people, generally, were mostly concerned with time, and the swift passing of time, at the close of one year and the beginning of the next. How mistaken I was! Nowadays I seem to hear friends remarking regularly on the swiftness of time. New Year, springtime, summertime, autumn and wintertime, and these come round, and pass, with uncanny swiftness. How right was Macbeth: "Time and the hour run through the roughest day". Not creep, nor walk but run. Time's speed certainly does not increase with the passing of the years, but somehow it appears to!

It is not difficult to look back over the past months and then realise, and admit, that there are certain matters that one was quite determined to attend to which simply have not been done. Alongside that there may have been certain ambitions in life that, years and years ago, we had set our minds upon – distant lands to visit, relatives and friends to keep in touch with, tasks about the house to perform, resolutions to keep – and now little of this is actually accomplished. We say, perhaps untruthfully, that there was insufficient time.

And how time passes! More swiftly! And there are moments when we ask if it does in fact, move more swiftly now than in your youth? Our hopes remain high and our resolutions are genuine and each new day is a new opportunity but the trouble with the morning is that it comes at such an ungodly hour! And we never seem to catch up.

Two outstanding names in English literature were the 17th century Diarists John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys. They knew each other well and were good friends who called on each other from time to time.

In July 1700, when they were both old men, Pepys wrote to Evelyn. He enclosed a recipe for barley water and then added, as a parting word '... but pray remember what o'clock it is with you and me'. The wise person will always do well to remember 'what o'clock it is'.

A lesser-known literary figure, perhaps, in the earlier part of the last century, was Charles Edward Montague. He was on the staff of the Manchester Guardian – a newspaper founded by Unitarians amongst others – and he wrote some interesting novels. He tells somewhere how he first realised the urgency of time. He was listening to an address by the well-known

Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol. In his remarks, Jowett said this:

'I find it set down in the tables that the average duration of human life at the age of 21 is 36 years. We may hope for a little more; we may fear a little less. But generally speaking 36 years of about 13,000 days is the term in which our task must be accomplished.'

Thankfully, nowadays, we may hope for rather more than 36 years after the age of 21. Indeed, in September 2011 those who delve into these profound matters declared that nowadays the average duration of human life at the age of 21 is 59 years of about 21,535 days, and this the up-to-date term in which our task is to be accomplished.

But it was this simple reduction of our life-span into days that so struck Montague, and there stole upon him the serious realisation that not one of these days could be wasted by any honourable person.

Time wasted is time gone-by forever, and time gone-by can never be recalled. Reflect on those striking words of Horace Mann, the American educationalist: Lost, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours each set with 60 diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone forever.

The months and years come and pass, and within them each of us has some task to perform. The teacher of Nazareth recognised this in his day, and the writer of the Fourth Gospel records him saying: 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: for the night cometh when no man can work'.

Inscribed on a wall in Cambridge there is this: 'Today is the first day of the rest of your life'.

So what do we do with our time? What do we do with our spare time? Spare time, we react, we don't have any spare time! But we do. Recall those moments when the tasks we had set ourselves are completed. We have finished our day's work and can go home; we have completed the jobs we set ourselves in the garden; we had a duty to perform on behalf of the congregation; we had those letters to write, and whatever it was we can now breathe an air of complete satisfaction. But the day is not yet done – far from it – and the daylight is good and will last for some hours yet, and we are not overcome with weariness. The time is ours – spare time – what do we do with it?

There is energy still stirring within us so do we read, walk, visit, paint, sew, potter, write, watch television, listen to the radio, attempt the crossword puzzle? Did someone say they do not have any spare time? Retired people have told me – and now I have discovered this for myself – since retirement it is

(Continued on next page)



In John Everett Millais's painting 'Mariana' the passage of time is represented by the autumn leaves scattered around her study. Public Domain via Wikimedia

The first day of the rest of your life

(Continued from previous page)

possible to be busier than before! But even so there is still spare time.

Let's suppose, for argument sake that someone works for 50 hours each week, and perhaps they are in bed for 10 hours each night.

That still leaves an average of seven hours each day. What happens to all this time? Does it take that long to eat? I should have thought not. If we are truthful of course we have spare time.

When we think this over carefully this is quite a sobering thought. There is no doubt that we have to spend a certain amount of time, sleeping. When we work we know what we have to do and what is expected of us. If we have retired, and plan our own day and time, we set our own goals. But when it is all done, and we ourselves say what is important and rewarding and good to do, what do we do and how do we use that time?

When we have thought this through and given the truest answer that we can, we have also given a clue – unconsciously perhaps – to the kind of person we really are.

I make this point, and indeed I labour to make this point, because time used well – and spare time used well equally – makes a substantial contribution to the quality of life we enjoy; and although time may appear to accelerate, that rich quality of life brings its own reward which truly sweetens and enriches the swift passing of the years.

And time is one of life's choicest gifts to us:

Time to watch a sunset; blend with trees and hills below.
Time to explore, to find which way a woodland road will go,
time to touch a flower petal, and to name a bird,

Time to answer kindness with a warm and friendly word
time to smile, and time to dream, time to be aware And thank
God for the loveliness given everywhere.

But, as with everything else down here on earth, there is a limit on time, and for the present we enjoy the privilege of participating in time.

There is a dramatic and picturesque scene from the court of Edwin, King of Northumbria, some 1500 years ago. It is night, and the ancient, giant, log-structured hall is lighted with flaming torches. In the middle of the hall a fire of wood is blazing. There is an atmosphere of expectation and excitement because the first-ever missionaries to visit England are newly arrived from Rome and are explaining their message.

A new message is always listened to with interest. We may imagine there is something approximating to a lecture or a sermon after which the listeners have the opportunity of asking questions. 'Can your new religion', someone enquires earnestly; 'shed any light on what happens after death?' The question is prompted by the sight of a small bird – a robin

perhaps – which has flown in from the darkness, passed through the lighted hall, and departed out into the darkness again. 'The spirit of man', the questioner continues, 'is like a bird flying through a lighted hall. It enters one door from the darkness, passes through the warmth and light, and then is gone'.

Ships that pass in the night, and speak only in the passing,

Only a signal shewn, and a distant voice in the darkness: So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak to one another, Only a look and a voice, then darkness again, and a silence.

The writer of Psalm 90 was expressing his own tenebrous thoughts on this matter when he

confessed: 'We spend our years as a tale that is told'. James Moffatt's translation of those words is: 'Our life is over like a sigh'. The Revised English Bible has it 'our years die away like murmur'.

One of the great poems about time is Christopher Marlow's *Faustus*. It is a long poem about Dr Faustus and the uncanny deal he has struck-up with the Devil. For 24 years the Devil will be his obedient servant, and Faustus's every wish would be readily granted. But, in return, the Devil would reclaim his soul at the close of 24 years.

Well and good! But there comes a point in the drama when the 24 years have run their course, and Dr Faustus sees, perhaps for the very first time, what a dreadful bargain he has

struck:

Oh Faustus

Now thou hast but one bare hour to live,

And then thou must be damned perpetually!

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven

That time may cease and midnight never come;

Fair nature's eye rise, rise again and make

Perpetual day; or let this hour be but a year

A month, a week, a natural day,

That Faustus may repent and save his soul!

O lente, curite, noctis, equi!

The stars stand still, time runs, the clock

Will strike,

The devil will come and Faustus will be damned.

Yes indeed: Of all sad words of tongue or pen

The saddest are these: "It might have been".

But let us close on a much more positive note. Recall those lines engraved on the wall in Cambridge: 'Today is the first day of the rest of your life'. Take that to heart! For this is so whether you are 15, 45 or 95 years old. The first day. Therefore go out and exploit it and enjoy it. Go on to make something significant of each succeeding day. Let them be days you will be keen to remember. Let them be days you will not regret – at least for anything you have done – and thus you will use your time well and truly, and go on to live so as to relish and value times sure rewards.

The Rev Ashley Hills is a retired Unitarian minister.

Blessing, partnership – now marriage

When the Government announced in December that a bill would be put forward to legalise civil and religious gay marriage, Unitarians were mentioned in much of the coverage. The Rev Andy Pakula spoke on a BBC news broadcast. The denomination was mentioned in news articles as one of the groups fighting for equality. Nationally, that was a great opportunity. **Pat and Shammy Webster** write what it means to the people behind the headlines.

We Websters are excited and looking forward to the opportunity to bring the recognition to our relationship that has been missing.

Back in 2003 we had the most wonderful blessing performed at Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel in Altrincham. The Rev Celia Midgley understood that we felt the same need as any straight couple to say vows 'in front of God' and that together we would see all that life had to throw at us. Celia couldn't have done better. But, we needed more.

Civil Partnerships were introduced in 2005. We were the first lesbian couple in Manchester to have a civil partnership. This was a step forward, but did it really 'hit the mark'? No! Our Civil Partnerships (CP) is a recognition that we are committed to each other and want the same 'rights' in choosing a next-of-kin; that we want to safeguard the financial welfare of each other. But, really, this was a paperwork project – making sure that if one of us died we would be entitled to the same financial benefits as a 'straight' widow or widower. It also would ensure that where a next-of-kin was required, we would be legally recognised to represent each other. Our CP put an end to a lot of worries regarding each other's welfare. But, we needed more.

From a legal point of view, our CP is more like a business partnership. But our relationship is far more than that. Although there are some marriages that resemble a business partnership, the real idea behind the institution of marriage is a sacred union.

If we were to describe what the new laws will mean to us in layman's terms – without the religious or legal connotations – it would be that our Blessing service was our vows to God and that we are *very* sure God recognises our union. Our CP was our opportunity to ensure the wellbeing and welfare of each other in the eyes of the law. A marriage, considered in the same context as heterosexual unions would be a public confirmation of a life-long relationship. A marriage says we are tied by the heart, the most important organ and the most important feeling of humanity!

Our relationship, in the 10 years we have been together has gone through more 'rough patches' than many relationships



Pat (left) and Shammy Webster toasted the proposed change in the law which will offer equal marriage to same-sex couples.

would survive. We have gone through the death of three of our joint parents, a long-term illness that was a stress to both of us, without any outside support, resulting in permanent disability, the loss of regular income from ill-health and redundancy. We have also had to put up with the persecution based on our sexuality from narrow-minded and Jurassic thinking. Our relationship is stronger than ever and we are preparing to celebrate our 10 year anniversary (from the date of the Blessing) in September 2013 with such confidence in our relationship it confirms that "nothing will rock us!"

It has been decades since scholars and clergy realised (or admitted) that the Bible has no guidance or opinion of homosexuality and has been greatly misquoted. Those misinterpretations, which considered same-sex relationships immoral, have handed down the 'fear' factor which has been fought furiously by gay campaigners and their supporters.

Marriage is a contract between two people, the giving of themselves to each other in every aspect – physically, mentally and emotionally. We would dearly love for everyone to recognise our relationship respectfully for its worth and although we are both comforted in the knowledge that the majority of Unitarians are supportive to us and do see us as 'married', the law to allow equal marriage will, we hope, bring that same understanding from other areas of society.

Neither of us are naive in thinking the new law will change mindsets overnight. But it is a vital step in ensuring that future generations do not have to go through the various stages of confirmation that we have. The great 'leap' in the law we are looking forward to in 2014 will take a few years to seriously chisel at society's ingrained understanding of marriage being only between one man and one woman. But laws do change secular thinking. Fifty years ago a woman wanting to work in the Fire Service would have been laughed at... know what we mean?

Pat and Shammy Webster live in Manchester. Shammy is student pastor at Cairo Street (Unitarian) Chapel, Warrington.

Government adopts Unitarian view

The Government's same-sex marriage consultation did not include the option of religious marriages. After months of lobbying, the proposed law eventually included that option.

Derek McAuley explains

Rarely can Unitarians be said to have influenced national policy in recent years, but I believe that with equal marriage we can be proud of our achievement. The Government originally stated that only civil marriage would be possible for same-sex couples, yet Culture Secretary Maria Miller has announced that those religious groups who wish to carry out same sex marriages would be given the power to do so. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition have given their support. This is a dramatic shift in policy. Thank you to all those who have worked so hard on this issue. I met with Helen Grant, Minister for Equalities, at the MPs' offices in Portcullis House in Westminster shortly after the announcement in December. She commended the Unitarian and Free Christian Church for our stance and for our efforts to promote equal marriage. She made it clear that equal marriage "will go through" but that there is a lot of hard work ahead for us all. She said she looked forward to working with us on the arrangements to ensure that they are workable.

Ms Grant confirmed that these would not be "civil marriages in religious premises" which reassured me – particularly after the difficulties and expense that some congregations have experienced registering for civil partnerships.

The details will have to be developed. I expressed how disappointed friends and colleagues within the Church of England and the Church of Wales would be with the decision to bring forward new legislation to prevent same sex marriages which I saw as further "tightening the screw" against their wishes. (And, indeed, a few days later it emerged that the Church of England had not been consulted on the law to ban same-sex marriages within that church.) Ms Grant's response was that this reflected the position of the Church of England as the established Church and Canon Law.

The Minister confirmed that the legislation will be brought forward in this Parliamentary term early this year, with an expectation that it would be passed in 2013 and implemented in 2014.

It is significant that the submission I made summarising and supporting our perspective is referred to on four occasions in the Government's response to the original consultation document, in particular in paragraph 3.6:

"This belief that relationships between same-sex and opposite sex couples was often referenced as the relationships being seen as equal, as shown by the Unitarian Church stated:

"The General Assembly has expressed its support for full equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people, in 1977 making it clear that ministry in the denomination was open to all and expressing abhorrence of discrimination on the basis

of sexual orientation ...This position reflects our longstanding acceptance of the equal validity of same sex relationships in the same way as opposite sex."

Our commitment to religious liberty is explicitly quoted in paragraph 4.11:

"Some religious organisations including the Unitarian and Free Churches (sic) responded that:

"This is a matter of religious freedom; we do not wish to impose our views on others; however, their opposition should not prevent us from doing what we believe to be just and right."

The Government also accepted our wish, which is highlighted in the response, that couples who wish to have a ceremony to mark their conversion of a civil partnership to a civil marriage, which will be open to the 50,000 gay and lesbian couples, can have it on religious premises. This ceremony will have no legal effect but represents a great opportunity for Unitarian and Free Christian Churches to outreach and provide a significant new service for their local community.

We have come a long way on the journey towards inclusiveness and equality. The Unitarian Movement has certainly been reported more extensively than ever before in the national press, on television and in social media. We have a lot more to do to ensure that the legislation is not blocked and to argue our case based on our deeply held principles of freedom, reason and tolerance.

To read the full Government response see: <http://bit.ly/Uzjc3d>

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Consultation in Scotland

On 12 December the consultation on a draft Bill to allow same sex marriage in Scotland was opened. The plans have received cross party support in the Scottish Parliament.

According to the Scottish government, the consultation seeks views on the detail of the legislation. It covers not only the introduction of same sex marriage but the detail of important protections in relation to religious bodies and celebrants, freedom of speech and education.

The Bill contains a provision making it clear that the introduction of same sex marriage has no impact on existing rights to freedom of speech.

Scotland Health Secretary Alex Neil said: "We are introducing same sex marriage in Scotland because it is the right thing to do.

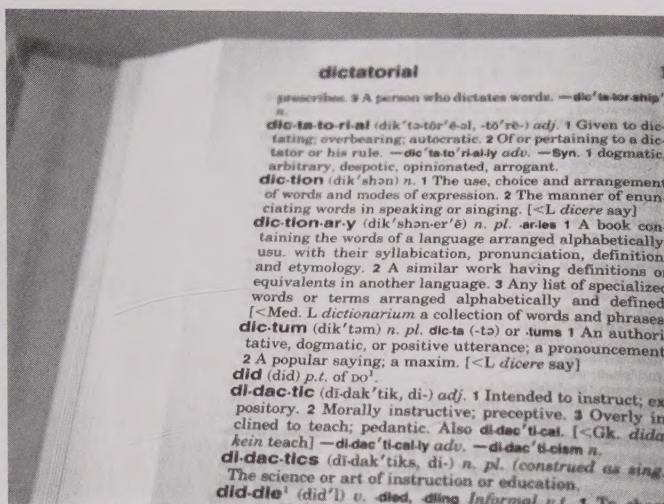
"We are striving to create a Scotland that is free, tolerant and fair and I am pleased to say there is support across the chamber for this significant step."

The Rev Maud Robinson, Unitarian Minister at St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh expressed the feelings of Unitarians in Scotland when she said; "Scottish Unitarians warmly welcome the draft bill and its provisions to allow religious bodies to conduct same-sex marriages. Unitarian Ministers and Marriage Celebrants are looking forward to welcoming same-sex couples to be married in our churches."

We Unitarians should love language more

By Christine Avery

I want to make a plea for the importance of language. The following quote comes from the current issue of 'Faith and Freedom': "Human life began in darkness and chaos, but the invention of language, which was part and parcel of the invention of religion, lit up life for us and has enabled us to say Yes to our world and our own lives within it." (This is the Rev Frank Walker, citing, with approval, the views of Don Cupitt.)



'In Unitarian discussion groups I have been surprised by the participants' aversion to any questioning of what words might mean and how best to keep these tools of thought in good repair.'

I agree with this view of language for many reasons but I would like to know how much discussion of the words we use is tolerable to other people. In Unitarian discussion groups I have been surprised by the participants' aversion to any questioning of what words might mean and how best to keep these tools of thought in good repair.

If it is mostly unacceptable to talk about our language, why should this be so?

As a lover of language – a love affair which I don't expect everyone to share – I struggle to understand any distaste for focusing on what you mean by a particular word. If someone says, "Now, what do you mean by 'moon'?" they are (probably) just being awkward. But if they ask, "What do you mean by 'religion'?" they are opening up a fertile field. This one word, 'religion', contains chalk and cheese, sadism and true saintliness, fanatical dogmatism and humble openness to reality. Arguably, we would be better off without such a baggy monster of a word. But if people insist on using it – and many other similar words – while refusing to explore what it means to them, then are we not lost in a fog?

I quite like fogs but would not choose to spend all my time in one. Testing out the meaning of a word lets you enter into the web of meaning of which it is a part. Webs of meaning are where consciousness lives. But perhaps those who refer dismissively to "mere semantics" are calling for an unselfconscious, spontaneous use of words, like the instinctive singing of a bird?

Looking at the practice of those who use words most effectively, I suggest that it hardly ever works like that. Good writers think strenuously about their choice of words, revise repeatedly and stretch for new meanings – which you can only do if you are very self-aware as a language user.

Of course language is always inadequate, and like any human creation it can be misused. People can slap false and limiting labels onto others or try to stuff them into verbal pigeon-holes, or they can use words to reinforce prejudices ... and many other bad things. This is not a weakness of language as such but of us as language users. Standing back and looking at what you are doing helps you to avoid such weaknesses.

Then the strengths of language can be realised and marvelled at: its capacity to blend with the non-linguistic to make a human reality which is admittedly constructed and provisional but all the same transcends its limitations. Its capacity to evoke realms of experience is remarkable. To give an example: there

are parts of my life which I value but only dimly remember. But I can restore the freshness and detail of these events by looking back at an entry in my journal. Then I can reflect and connect and gain a bit more understanding. If I had not made an effort to choose the right words in the first place, then I don't think this would happen.

More significantly, any literate person will know that reading the work of good writers gives them vivid, multi-dimensional impressions of events in which they themselves never took part and, in the case of fiction, which never even happened. Here be meanings! And meaning is what, as Unitarians, we so often claim to be seeking in life.

I don't know of any examples of the good and great writers treating language dismissively. Quite the opposite. Some speak almost as if the motive of their writing was to extend and glorify language itself. That, I feel, is going a bit far, but when TS Eliot talks of the poet's remit to 'purify the dialect of the tribe', one can understand and welcome the sentiment.

It is sometimes claimed that most peoples' minds are full of trivial chatter, and that the sooner they empty their minds of words and start thinking about nothing, then the sooner they will achieve union with truth, reality, the divine. This must be respected as the chosen spiritual path of some of us, but it is a *via negativa*, and for many of us, the *via positiva*, affirmation of the created world, is arguably the right path. Without words, silence itself could be meaningless. It is conscious minds fanned into life by language that can enter into a living silence.

In a novel by William Brodrick* there is a character called "the Shoemaker" who in an oppressive, Cold War political situation, is able to find essential good words. Of him it is said "It was his words that kept hope alive, spoken honestly at a time of lies, saying what you thought but couldn't or dare not say." And later, "It was his gift ... to choose words and order them in such a way as to light a fire in winter. He wrote about the past as if it was ours and the future as if it had already arrived. It was the rhymes and rhythms of independence; a meter first heard during the Nazi occupation."

This is the kind of thing that language can do. Surely Unitarians should be fully alive to its numinous, soul-saving achievements?

* *The Day of the Lie* (2011)

Christine Avery is a member of Plymouth Unitarian Church.
Dictionary photo by David Tipton

Derek enjoyed an early night at the Palace

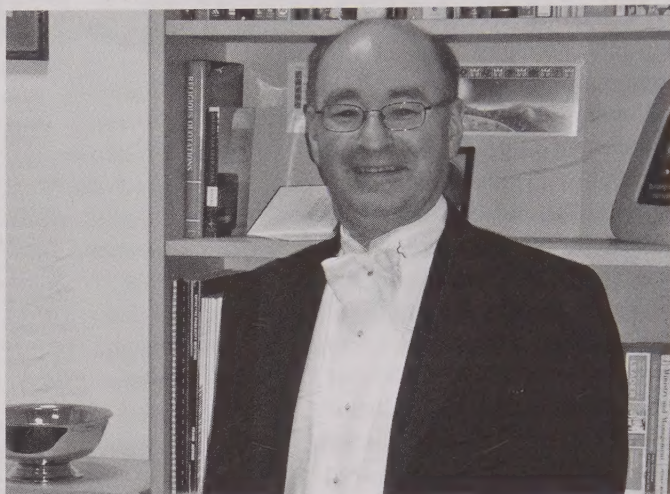
By Derek McAuley

Tuesday, 11 December was a big day for me. In the evening it was a great pleasure to attend a reception at Buckingham Palace. What I had originally planned as a quiet day in the office in the run-up to the event became 'all go' when it emerged that the Culture Secretary, Maria Miller, would announce the details of the Government's response to its consultation on equal marriage. I was asked to meet Helen Grant MP, Minister for Equalities, at 3.40pm and then I rushed back to Essex hall to change. It was a 'white tie' event; thankfully a top hat was optional but yes I did wear tails.

Instructions required attendance at Horse Guards Parade where identification was checked and then guests boarded a coach to be taken down the Mall, into the main gates and then through the central arch of Buckingham Place. A red carpet led up to the main entrance with Beefeaters resplendent in their scarlet uniforms. Life Guards were also there to greet us. Cameras were forbidden and mobile phones had to be turned off.

You cannot but help to be overawed by the palace; the grand staircase to the entertaining rooms on the upper level with the paintings of kings and queens by the great masters, the gold and silver and the huge crystal chandeliers and magnificent floral displays. There was lots of gold braid, medals and honours on display. It is easy to be seduced by the splendour. The food, as you would expect, was of the highest quality. It was a stand-up buffet of chicken and mushroom pie, cannelloni, croquettes and mixed veg., followed by small profiteroles. Champagne poured from magnums and white and red wine were served along with ample non-alcoholic drinks. The staff were all attired in red livery.

The Reception, for about 500 people split into two groups, was primarily for the Diplomatic Community with a leavening of



Derek prepared to leave from Essex Hall for a reception at Buckingham Palace. Photo by Andrew Mason

Angels celebrate 3 years



Stephen Lingwood (back row second from left) celebrated with the Street Angels.

Bolton Street Angels celebrated three years of continuous work on the streets of Bolton at a special service at the Salvation Army. The service was attended by Bolton Street Angel volunteers along with the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester, George Almond and wife Elizabeth, Mayor and Mayoress of Bolton, Guy and Colette Harkin, and MP for Bolton South East, Yasmin Qureshi. The evening, led by Stephen Lingwood, minister of Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, included a minute's silence for the Police and presentation of the Big Society Award led by the founder of Street Angels – Christian Nightlife Initiatives Network (CNI) Paul Blakey. The evening was a great opportunity to celebrate the difference made on the streets of Bolton over the last three years and to set the vision for the years to come.

– Submitted by Stephen Lingwood

people from business, community and faith groups. After a buffet dinner and drinks, we were ushered into a long gallery of rooms and then formed up in rows to greet the royal party. The diplomats seemed to be as nervous as everyone else as we waited in anticipation. The Queen was accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh and Prince Charles by the Duchess of Cornwall. Prince Charles stopped and asked where I was from. I replied I was Unitarian Chief Officer originally from Northern Ireland. He commented briefly upon the situation there. They were quickly gone...

There was lots of mingling. I was pleased to renew my acquaintance with Dr Desmond Biddulph, Chairman of the Buddhist Society and Vivian Wineman, President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and to meet for the first time, Bharti Tailor, Secretary General of the Hindu Forum and the first woman to lead a Hindu organisation in Britain. I chatted to the Moldovan Ambassador and staff from the High Commissions of Belize and Nigeria.

I passed the Archbishop of York in the corridor and then suddenly discovered the Archbishop of Canterbury beside me. We greeted each other and I congratulated him on his appointment as chair of Christian Aid from next May which had been announced earlier that day and explained the General Assembly as a sponsoring body had been pleased to give him our formal support. He asked had I seen the Archbishop of York as he was taking him back to Lambeth Palace and I pointed him in the right direction. Like any party I suppose – just rather bigger!

I was proud to have the opportunity to represent the Unitarian and Free Christian Movement at such an important civic event. It was ironic in this anniversary year of the Great Ejection of 1662, which was of course inspired by Charles II, to enter both literally and metaphorically the corridors of historic power and privilege. I also reflected that the Unitarians had earlier that day been at the cutting edge of radical social reform with the announcement of the proposed law to bring equal marriage – a stance underlined by the fact that Her Majesty is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, whose position was the subject of much debate that day in Parliament.

I was, however, home before 11.

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

What's in a Unitarian name?

I can look back on 2012 as a good year of 'Unitarian-spotting', though sometimes my enthusiasm has led me astray. I thoroughly enjoyed a November evening at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead celebrating the 150th anniversary of their building. A new jazz composition for choir, organ and orchestra was performed to great effect by Rosslyn Hill Chapel choir plus Channing School Choir, organist Konstantin Gensitskiy and a jazz ensemble. There was also a cello quartet from Channing and a brilliant Schubert solo from concert pianist Sholto Kynoch. The music fairly zinged around the packed chapel to rapturous applause. In the interval I strolled over to look at the splendid memorial to the Unitarian Helen Allingham (1848-1926) whose name I had come across in Altrincham, Cheshire when I lived there, as had she as a child. She moved south to pursue a fine career as an artist and was the first woman to be elected to the Royal Society of Artists in Water Colour. There is a Helen Allingham Society devoted to the celebration of her life and work (www.helenallingham.com).

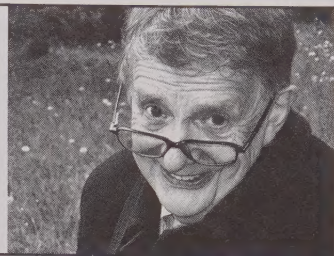
Then my eye was caught by the name on another memorial nearby. Welby, described as son of the Rev Charles Well-beloved (1769-1858), a Unitarian minister of great renown. Welby, son of Wellbeloved? He must have changed his name, snipping the 'loved' bit from the end. Strange, but wait a minute! Welby? Isn't that the name of the Rt Revd the Lord Bishop of Durham, Archbishop of Canterbury-elect? Does Justin Welby have Unitarian ancestry, as a descendant of Charles Wellbeloved? Into the computer search engines we must go. Now, what is the origin of the name Welby? Ah, here it is. Something German, 'dweller near a wood'. Not very promising. Let's look at the Archbishop-elect's *Wikipedia* entry. Oh dear. It tells me that his forbears were German Jews who came to this country to escape anti-Semitism. Drat! Not a Wellbeloved then. The thought that the head of the Church of England might have had half-concealed Unitarian blood in his veins had tickled me no end. Alas no, Jewish blood instead. A *Guardian* article described his father as something of a Walter Mitty character with an alcohol problem, who had worked in the US as a bootlegger and concealed a previous marriage. So, Jewish, fantasist, bootlegger, alcoholic or Unitarian? I wonder which the Archbishop's preference would be?

* * *

A meander round the centre of my old home city of Birmingham yielded better results. The Museum and Art Gallery has a section on the history of the city, in which Unitarians get a positive mention. No surprise really, what with the Chamberlain family at one time 'city fathers', as we used to say, and plenty of other Unitarian worthies eminent there too. In Chamberlain Square stands the Birmingham Conservatoire, a music study and performance centre including a concert hall named after Adrian Boult, he having been an early conductor of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, some years after Neville Chamberlain had established it. Outside the hall stands a statue of Joseph Priestley, which I was glad to see has not been flogged off by the city council to raise money to pay for government cuts. He is holding a metal ring in one hand and pestle and mortar in the other, indicating that he is better remembered as a scientist than a Unitarian minister. On the day I saw him, someone had stuck a fizzy drink bottle in his hand, which he is staring at, earnestly. Not entirely inappropriate, though I wish it had been a copy of *Errors of the Trinity*.

Funny Old World

By
John Midgley



* * *

Renowned *Guardian* editor of the past, the Unitarian CP Scott (1846-1932) turned up in a Steve Bell cartoon in the paper in December. Now there's fame indeed, though I doubt if Scott would have approved. And how famous do you have to be to get into the *Guardian* birthdays column? That's where I spotted Professor David Williams, who has a considerable reputation in the field of astronomy, in academia and the Royal Astronomical Society, as well as being a very acceptable Unitarian lay preacher. His 2004 Essex Hall Lecture on Joseph Priestley is available on line (<http://bit.ly/WhsIx4>), and he might soon be able to tell us what Mars is made of, and I don't mean the sweetie bar. His wife, former GA President Jane Williams was at the Rosslyn Hill Chapel concert, where she shared the news that both of their sons now hold the title 'professor'. Richard is Professor of Contemporary Visual Cultures (does that mean water colours or cartoons?) in Edinburgh and Alan is Professor of Collaborative Composition at Salford (does that include chapel choirs singing jazz?) "Three professors in one family, more than enough for anyone," Jane jested, but proudly.

* * *

Another name likely to crop up in the news-media is the Rev Chris Hudson, who is heard from time to time on the Radio 4 Today programme talking about the resurgence of violence in Belfast, where he is minister. He has a fine track record as a secret negotiator between peacemakers and terrorists. Chris Hudson's Belfast Unitarian Church is called All Souls, one of three that were given that name. Wolverhampton retains it but Golders Green has quietly discarded it. Too quaint, perhaps? Other Unitarian places of worship have quite charming names. Edinburgh church is St Mark's, our only saint, unless you count St Saviourgate in York. I like the sound of chapels in Park Lane (Ashton on Mersey and Cradley). There is a truly rural-sound to Elder Yard (Chesterfield), Flowergate (Whitby) and Flowery Field (Hyde). The Chapel in Padiham in Lancashire is called Nazareth. Leicester, Coventry and Hinckley each have the Great Meeting. We have a number called Old Meeting House, Kidderminster has a New Meeting and Liverpool has the delightful Ancient Chapel of Toxteth. All of this makes me glad we were spared the name of one church I heard of recently. The Rev Penny Johnson tells me she has just bought the first book of *Old Chapels in the Black Country*, the area of the West Midlands where she at one time was minister to a group of no less than 10 congregations. The book mentions Unitarian churches at Netherend and Coseley and there are some pictures of interest. Two further books in the same series (*pub. Sutton Publishing*) mention our Wolverhampton, West Bromwich, Dudley, Walsall and Stourbridge churches. Among other pictures there is a photograph of Sodom Primitive Methodist Church at Upper Ettingshall. Something in me is deeply sure that Penny is glad that that was not one of hers.

Letters to the Editor

Unitarian slogan was coined by Tolstoyan

To the Editor:

John Midgley ('Funny Old World', 24 November) is quite right to say that SH Mellone, the last secretary of the British & Foreign Unitarian Association, promoted a good deal of Unitarian publicity material in the 1920s, but he didn't coin the phrase 'Are you a Unitarian without knowing it?' This emerged as a result of a conversation around that time between my two grandfathers.

One of them was JT Bibby, a stalwart Unitarian whose life-long service to the denomination was eventually rewarded by his election as GA President in 1939. The other was JH Goring, who was not a Unitarian but a Tolstoyan who had helped to found the short-lived pacifist/vegetarian Brotherhood Church. He was head of a small Fleet Street advertising agency and an accomplished copywriter whose phrase 'Say it with flowers' is still used by Interflora today. One day Bibby told Goring that the B&FUA were planning to mount a publicity campaign and asked him if he would like to run it. After he had agreed to do so, Bibby handed him a pile of books and pamphlets about Unitarianism, and it was in one of these that Goring found the suggestion that some people were 'Unitarians without knowing it'. He then coined the question that became the keynote of the campaign.

I wonder who it was who once suggested that, in view of declining attendances in many places of worship, a more appropriate question might now be: 'Are you a Unitarian without showing it?'

Jeremy Goring

St Leonards-on-Sea

Women's League support may have paid off

To the Editor:

In 2009-10 the Women's League national charity was Meningitis Research and for which a large sum of money was raised. The speaker from the charity spoke about the loss of his young son and told us that a vaccine for the most common strain

was teasingly close. Readers might be interested in a short note in *The New Scientist* magazine dated 24 November. It said: 'For the first time, a vaccine for Meningitis B – the most common strain of the disease in Europe and North America – has been backed by the European Medicines Agency. The vaccine, called 4CMenB and developed by Novartis, should receive full approval from the European Commission within the next three months'.

The Rev Celia Cartwright
Kendal

Where was spirituality in election coverage?

To the Editor:

I'm absolutely certain everyone who puts themselves up for election to the Executive is a dedicated and committed Unitarian. However, is it just me who was a bit depressed that the election statements in the 10 November *Inquirer* contained almost no mention at all of spirituality, worship, prayer, love, compassion, justice, the Sacred, meditation, theology or faith? Perhaps this was because of the kind of questions *The Inquirer* asked, rather than reflecting the candidates themselves. But I can't help thinking of the words of Peter Morales, the Unitarian Universalist President, "The one growth strategy we have never tried as a movement is religion. And religion is the only growth strategy that will work."

Stephen Lingwood

Minister, Bank Street Unitarian Chapel, Bolton

Relax stigma of assisted dying

To the Editor:

It is a criminal offence in Britain, to help someone to end their own life. I think that in certain circumstances, the stigma of criminality and its consequences should be relaxed. What circumstances? When the patient, sound in mind but miserably and terminally incapacitated, has the agreement of both nearest and dearest and his/her medical specialist. This is an awesome responsibility for those carers, but so is the daily, nightly, weekly, monthly,

year in, year out care of the patient. The prevailing opinion in our culture is that Life is God-given, and therefore sacred – to be played out with stoicism to the bitter end. If there is suffering, then some unseen purpose is being played out, and it strengthens the spirit. What for, if death is the end? What if we really are spirit having a physical experience? I recall from General Science lessons at school that "matter is neither created nor destroyed in a chemical experiment". The same may be true of spirit. Death of the body would then release it. Many people here and in other cultures believe this to be the case. If so, then assisted dying is an act of love.

Janet Briggs

Glasgow

2020 cannot be a trust without independence

To the Editor:

In his letter (*Inquirer*, 27 October) Peter Whitham raises an important issue with regard to the 2020 Unitarian Congregational Development Fund. As far as I can see, this is not a trust in the legal sense as it sits within the General Assembly. A trust would be an independent body. If it were independent, then I would question if the GA would be allowed to give this body any funds that were donated to the General Assembly. If it were independent it would need to have its own trust deed with clear purposes, which would be available to view. Assuming it is a part of the General Assembly then it does not really have a board only a group of people tasked with setting it up and managing it. The trustees of the General Assembly should decide itself what the aims of the Fund are and would have the last say on where the money went. These decisions cannot be made by the 2020 Group as they do not carry any legal responsibility for the Fund.

Anyone donating to the fund can designate where their donation goes e.g. for a geographical area or a type of expenditure. This would make such money restricted and could only be spent on what the donor stipulated.

Louise Rogers

Newcastle-under-Lyme Unitarian Community

More than £1 million for Pudsey

Some of you may be old enough to remember a popular television programme in the 1980's called 'The Six Million Dollar Man' – a series about a man with bionic powers, and there was also a spin-off programme about a woman with similar amazing strengths.

Well, Unitarians in the Lampeter area may not have their 'six million dollar' man and woman, but now they do have their 'one million pound couple' in the shape of fundraising minister, Goronwy Evans and his wife, Beti.

In November, the Rev and Mrs Evans reached an almost incredible landmark, after raising a huge £1 million for the BBC 'Children In Need' charity, over a period of 30 years.

Since 1983, the couple have co-ordinated the fundraising campaign in their corner of south west Wales, working with a team of dedicated volunteers.

"We needed to raise around £16,000 to reach the £1million mark this year, and so far we've had over £22,000 coming in," said Goronwy.

"We see such great efforts from people year on year. It really is amazing. Scores of local schools get involved, as well as all kinds of clubs and societies, and of course, there are some great individual efforts each year. The way that people react to this appeal is really inspiring, and illustrates that there is a lot of kindness out there."

Beti also wanted to praise the efforts of the trusty band of volunteers who've worked alongside the Evanses.

"The support we've had from these people really has been fantastic. Many of them have been involved for 30 years, and there is a great feeling of teamwork – everybody works so well together," she said.

But after 30 years of hard work, Beti and Goronwy Evans plan to take a back seat next year, surrendering the reins of co-ordinating the appeal in the area.

"It's time for new blood to take over," said Goronwy. "We will still be involved in helping out, but we think the time is right now for someone else to take things on – 30 years at the helm is a very long time."

The Rev Evans has just reached another landmark as well, having celebrated 48 years as minister of Brondeifi Chapel,



The Rev Goronwy Evans and his wife Beti Evans with one of the original Pudsey bears. Photo by Tim Jones

Lampeter, on 4 November.

The Rev Evans started his career as a minister by taking charge of the Brondeifi and Cellan chapels in 1964. At one point he was minister for six chapels in the area. Although he retired from the full-time ministry six years ago, he has remained as minister of Brondeifi.

Since the chapel was built in 1874, only three ministers have been at the helm. The Rev Rees Cribin Jones served from 1874 to 1915. He was followed by the Rev T Oswald Williams who took charge in 1915 and remained there until his death in 1963, having given 48 years of service.

With the Rev Evans now having served the congregation at Brondeifi for 48 years as well, the chapel has a strong tradition of long-serving ministers.

"I often joke that being the minister of Brondeifi is a life sentence," said Goronwy. "All three of us have spent most of our adult lives there. I don't know if it's unique, but there can't be too many chapels or churches where that has happened."

Essex Hall featured by Baha'is

Essex Hall features in a modest but handsome publication recently issued by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United Kingdom. *In the Footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Baha'* charts the events which took place when 'Abdul-Baha', the eldest son of the founder of the Baha'i faith, visited Britain in December 1912 and January 1913. On 2 January 1913 he spoke at Essex Hall to some thousand suffragettes of the Women's Freedom League. The entry, quoted from Robert Weinberg's biography of Lady Blomfield, is illustrated with a photograph of Essex Hall as it was in 1920. Thanks to some nifty work by Andrew Mason at Essex Hall, the photograph, credited in the new booklet to the Lindsey Press, was retrieved from Mortimer Rowe's 1959 *The History of Essex Hall*.

– Kate Taylor



ESSEX HALL FRONTAGE, 1920

Gellionnen had a packed folk festival service

By Marian Littlepage

For some years now, the small town of Pontardawe has held seasonal festival weekends. In times past we had large international folk festivals each August and it was then that Gellionnen Chapel began to join in with a folk service. We took up the challenge once again for the Pontardawe Summerfest and this year's service was a great success.

Our minister during the early years was the late Rev Dr Elwyn Davies who had gladly agreed to support a folk service and this time around we invited the Rev Alun Wyn Dafis, Elwyn's elder son to take his father's place. Alun Wyn arrived with his piano accordion and daughter Ffion with her saxophone. Two superb musicians!

The service was marvellous, filled with snippets of local history and lusty singing, led by Roland Emmanuel, a very-well known bluegrass performer who runs regular sessions at a local hostelry and also an annual Bluegrass Festival. Other musicians played violin, mandolin, harp, slide trombone and euphonium!

We are always blessed with the firm support of our local folk club and are deeply appreciative. Also, this year of course we were proud to show off our whole windows. Three years ago we were very seriously vandalised. There was not an intact window left, not even an unbroken vase. But just a few months back, the windows were replaced after many setbacks.

We're finding our winter more comfortable this time around. We have never failed to appreciate the support given to us by our sister chapels and churches. The work goes on and our



The pews were packed for the folk service held at the Gellionnen Chapel. Photo by Bob Grainger Photography

attendance is usually tiny, but we are very good at celebrating, whatever the numbers – although we probably had 100 for the folk service.

Once again, to those who supported us with their care, prayers and purses after the big chapel trash, Thank you.

Hopefully Gellionnen will continue to reap the rewards for many years to come. We still have a long way to go.

Marian Littlepage is a member at Gellionnen.

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